

FAIRY TALES RETOLD

By Warwick James Price

THE immense amount of present-day nature study to the contrary notwithstanding, there is to be met with, in nine cases out of ten, an amazing ignorance of animal life. By this is meant an ignorance of every-day facts about every-day beasts—about moles and bats and tadpoles and guinea-pigs, for instance—an ignorance, moreover, based almost wholly upon old beliefs, unwise saws or even arrant superstition.

How many small citizens of this land of common schools and university-extension courses, and how many larger ones, too, firmly believe that guinea-pigs came once upon a time from far-off Guinea? that the tadpole sheds his tail? that bats love above all things else to entangle themselves in one's hair? that moles are blind?

Yet not one of these things is true. Squeaky Miss Guinea-Pig no more came from the French or Portuguese colonies of that name than Mr. Norway Rat came across seas with other Norse immigrants. The tadpole's tail does not drop off; it develops with time into a proper part of his more mature body. If a panicky bat gets into your hair, he is as distressed about it as you are yourself; and it is the vilest of libels upon an eccentric but harmless beast which declares that a bat's body is the invariable abiding-place for vermin in general and for bedbugs in particular.

As for the mole, he has the usual complement of eyes, and exceedingly bright and clever ones; but thoughtful Mother Nature, remembering that he was to be a professional tunneler, set them deep into little protecting muffs of fur. "After hours," or at luncheon-time, or on his rare days off, these keen eyes may be brought forward just as the beaver's or badger's.

There are Munchhausen stories told of these fellows too. The badger's legs, however, are not shorter on one side than on the other, nor does that clever workman beaver use his broad tail for a trowel. The still older yarn that he also brings it into service to carry mud and stones to his dam is not now believed in as once it was—as a matter of fact, the cute little mason of deserted streams is pretty smart to tote his plaster about (as he does) between his chin and his diminutive forepaws.

Need it be added that the domestic cat has not nine lives? that the bee does not die if deprived of his sting? and that the stolid little earthworm does not arrive here, falling with the raindrops? Going farther afield, one comes across as many more mistaken ideas. It is only Mrs. Bear, for instance, who torpidly sleeps away the winter; Mr. Bruin never loses the consciousness of his enforced but temporary widowhood. The dying song of the swan may possibly be her sweetest, but it is far indeed from harmonious. The

Mother's Voice

By C. F. McDonald

"Oh, will you never go to sleep?"
I heard an angry father say,
As on his aching knees he crept
To where his little baby lay.
"Oh, will you never go to sleep?"
His voice grew into one long sigh.
His answer—Ah, his answer was
A screeching, lusty baby-cry!

"Oh, darling baby, go to sleep!"
I heard a tired mother say,
As wearily she softly crept
To where her little baby lay.
"Oh, go to sleep, my little one!"
And softly she began to sing
A sweet and gentle lullaby—
And lo, the child was slumbering!

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jackal does not guide the lion to his prey.

It is said of the king of beasts, by the way and with equal truth, that he is provided with a sharp spur in the end of his tail, with which he lashes himself into a fury. The appendage is there surely, but it is skin only, and would never for two minutes stand such harsh treatment. Equally fictitious is the venerable tradition, which heraldry itself has encouraged, that the pelican feeds her young with blood from her own maternal breast. The youngsters of the pelican family are brought up on fish, as are the small cranes and heron, the titbit coming out of that refrigerating pouch arrangement with which the mother has been fitted. It is a fact, however, that the old bird holds the fish against her breast in feeding her young, and the crimson bill does indeed appear like a blood spot on the snowy feathers. Hence the story.

In all the instances of too-easy credibility mentioned there at least have been the animals themselves existent to give some slight color to the fairy tales; but there are plenty of good people who still stoutly believe in weird creations which never have had other foundation in fact than the imaginations of travelers and romancers. The hoop-snake is a case in point—a reptile which takes his tail into his mouth and rolls himself along with astonishing swiftness, eventually striking the prey he has pursued with a whip-like blow of that same most useful tail, suddenly released from between the jaws.

And there is the basilisk or cockatrice, from which fabled monster the town of Basle, Switzerland, takes its name—a strange mixture of bird and serpent, able to slay with both his foul breath and his deadly sight. Said to be hatched by a serpent out of a cock's egg, its head and shoulders were represented as those of a common barn-yard rooster, with a viper's tail, and of course no feet. The best way to kill these gentle creatures, according to old Topsell, of "The Historie of Serpentes" fame, was to go among them wearing mirrors all over one's body, "whereby their own shapes are reflected upon their own faces, and so do they die."

There is a homely old fable which falls apropos of all of this. A New-Hampshire version of it runs that a skunk and a rattlesnake one day met each other, and stopped to swap news and gossip. "I heard a horrid story about you the other night," remarked the serpent.

"Huh," was the skunk's reply. "I dare say I've heard it myself—I've heard enough of them, anyhow. I'm tired of being painted worse than I am. I intend at the next General Convention of Beasts to introduce a motion that all persons found guilty of telling lies about any of us shall be attacked and killed. Will you support me?"

"In a minute!" cried rattler. "The truth is bad enough without adding falsehood to it."

The Quest

By Charlotte Becker

Love flew past with hidden face—
Could I help but give him chase?
Down the valley, up the hill,
Day and night, I seek him still.

In what covert he doth hide,
I would know if harm betide
One that to his word replies,
One that dares to meet his eyes.

I have heard—how true it be,
Sooth they will not tell to me—
Love hath joy to last for aye,
Dreams and songs to give away.

What to me if summer's here?
Till I find him all is drear—
Down the valley, up the hill,
Day and night, I seek him still.